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PAPERS FOR WAR TIME. No. 33



Peace With Empire The Problem

By

EDWYN BEVAN, M.A.

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Third Series

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PEACE WITH EMPIRE: THE PROBLEM

BY

EDWYN BEVAN, M.A.

HON. FELLOW OF NEW COLLEGE, OXFORD

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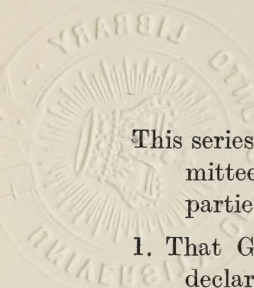
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BASIS OF PUBLICATION

This series of Papers is issued under the auspices of a Committee drawn from various Christian bodies and political parties, and is based on the following convictions :

1. That Great Britain was in August morally bound to declare war and is no less bound to carry the war to a decisive issue ;
2. That the war is none the less an outcome and a revelation of the un-Christian principles which have dominated the life of Western Christendom and of which both the Church and the nations have need to repent ;
3. That followers of Christ, as members of the Church, are linked to one another in a fellowship which transcends all divisions of nationality or race ;
4. That the Christian duties of love and forgiveness are as binding in time of war as in time of peace ;
5. That Christians are bound to recognize the insufficiency of mere compulsion for overcoming evil, and to place supreme reliance upon spiritual forces and in particular upon the power and method of the Cross ;
6. That only in proportion as Christian principles dictate the terms of settlement will a real and lasting peace be secured ;
7. That it is the duty of the Church to make an altogether new effort to realize and apply to all the relations of life its own positive ideal of brotherhood and fellowship ;
8. That with God all things are possible.

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‘GERMANY must be crushed.’ ‘To humiliate Germany would prevent any lasting peace.’ So the war of phrases goes on in our ears to-day. And it is largely a war of phrases. For if one gets the people on either side to describe what sort of resettlement of Europe they would like to see after the war, one does not find much difference, so far as recasting the European system goes. No responsible person in England has suggested that Germany should be dismembered in the sense that regions genuinely German in race and sympathies should be torn away from the Empire. No one on the other side can suppose that a settlement involving the loss of Alsace and the Polish provinces would be contemplated for a moment by Germany, except after a defeat so signal as to constitute in itself a pretty considerable humiliation.

What is overlooked in most of this controversy is that the question of resettlement is much more than a European question. When Germans say that they are fighting for their ‘place in the sun’, it is not Europe that they are thinking of, but Africa and Asia Minor and the Islands of the Pacific. Seeley pointed out long ago that rivalry between European nations for the acquisition of extra-European dominion was a main motive behind the wars of the last three centuries. It is well known that up to the eighties of the last century Germany had developed no ambition of extra-European empire. Bismarck, as we are constantly reminded nowadays, looked unfavourably upon a movement which would complicate Germany’s huge European task by rivalries in the colonial field. He was, however, induced to sanction in

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April 1884 the appropriation by Germany of a region in South-West Africa ; and then the process began. In the same year the German flag was hoisted in the Cameroons, in Togoland, and in East Africa. In 1885 Germany acquired a large portion of New Guinea, Kiaochao in 1897, and finally Samoa in 1899. The policy of Bismarck, who had described Germany after the Franco-Prussian War as 'satiated', was now thrown over as out of date. The new German Empire, coming as a parvenu among the older European States, which had already divided so much of the world outside Europe amongst themselves, was intensely anxious to have everything that constituted imperial prestige. It had the nervous and assertive delight of the parvenu in finding itself really in possession, just like England, of an Empire overseas. The party of Greater Germany was able increasingly to win the people to its own passion as it brought home through popular publications an imaginative realization of these countries beyond the sea which were Germany's very own. The story by which they had been acquired, the fights with brown or black peoples, the losses incurred by German troops, it invested with a halo of epic sentiment. And yet all the time there was a root of bitterness in the rejoicing. Germany had come too late into the field. Its Empire was really not comparable to the French African Empire, much less to the British Empire. But Germany deserved by its national greatness and efficiency to have the finest Empire of all ! And in the different colonies there were special causes of bitterness, constant galling reminders that their rivals had had the better of them—British Zanzibar an eyesore to German East Africa, the French dominions completely enclosing the German Cameroons, as Lieutenant Mizon declared with a note of triumph to the Paris Geographical Society—'Le hinterland des Camerouns est fermé.'

It is fairly evident that so long as this colonial rivalry goes on, there can be no steadfast peace, however satisfactorily to all concerned the map of Europe might be

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drawn. Those persons who are so zealously employed in directing popular attention to the principles on which political frontiers are to be readjusted, in the event of Germany being compelled to accept the terms of the Allies, might perhaps more usefully invite attention to the question of Imperialism outside Europe, if they really wish to labour for a 'lasting' settlement.

As has been said, there is already practical unanimity with regard to the leading principles on which the map of Europe should be re-drawn, whereas about the other questions people hardly think at all. A long letter, for instance, lies before me, sent to the press on September 17 by representatives of the Union of Democratic Control. The letter is headed 'Principles of a Lasting Settlement', and there is not one word in it of extra-European questions !

Perhaps many people, sympathetic with the kind of outlook for which the Union of Democratic Control stands, think that the settlement outside Europe could be effected in a simple and complete way by Great Britain restoring to Germany the colonies captured in the course of the war. It is plain that motives of various kinds might impel us in that direction. There would be a nobler motive—the desire to do the generous thing, to make no gain out of a contest waged professedly for an ideal principle, and also a motive distinctly baser, though apt to run into the other, the thought of what the other nations might say, the dislike not so much of being selfish as of being called selfish, the attraction to a generosity which shows in the world's eye. But the question is not really so simple as it may seem, and the considerations which might deter us from handing back to the German State its former colonies are by no means merely egoistic : there are the complications arising from the part taken by France or by the younger nations of the British Empire, by Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa, in the conquest of the German colonies, there is our obligation to consider the peoples native to the territories in question.

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For it is not mere inanimate property with which we are dealing, but races of living men, and, after our experience of what the German State is, it might be an act of questionable nobility to replace some millions of our fellow creatures under its absolute sway. And even the desire that England should make no profit out of the war does not give clear guidance, since the value of the German colonies, supposing England *wished* to appropriate them for its own benefit, falls very far below the expenditure which will have been incurred by England in the war, so that it is really not a question of England's gaining by the war, but of England's recovering some small part of its losses.¹

It would be out of place in these Papers to argue for either policy. One can merely point out that the question is not a simple one which can be decided straight away either on a generous or an egoistic impulse. One thing, however, it seems important for our purposes to realize. If it is the satisfaction of Germany we are thinking about, that is not at all likely to be achieved by our giving back to Germany her colonial Empire as it was last July. It is a leading fact in the situation that Germany felt her colonial Empire to be far too mean for her national greatness; she was tormented by the consciousness that it showed to a disadvantage beside the rival dominions of Great Britain and France. Germany's Empire had value for her, not for what it then was, but because she saw it as the nucleus of a much vaster Empire which successful war might give her in time to come.

To give Germany back her colonies, as they were, would be to restore a *status quo* essentially unstable. It does not even seem clear that Germany would not more easily acquiesce in a position where she stood altogether aside from the rivalries of transmarine Empire, than with dependencies which kept her appetite for overseas Empire

¹ See Sir Harry Johnston's article, 'Germany, Africa, and the Terms of Peace', in the April number of *The Nineteenth Century and After*.

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always alive and which yet could not satisfy it. If she is in for the running at all—to use the colloquial phrase—she can hardly be satisfied so long as she is not making the figure proportionate to her dignity.

But, on the other hand, if Great Britain and France continue to exhibit vast dominions overseas, as a source of exclusive profit and pride, can we expect the German people to do anything, through the generations, but lie in wait for another opportunity to grasp at Empire, a continual danger to European peace? The answer is that, so long as the old Imperialism continues to move the imagination, and excite the cupidity, of the different peoples, there can be no stable peace in the world. What is needed is a thorough re-examination of the imperial idea: we want an Imperialism—if we still give it that name—of a new sort.

One must face—not such questions as ‘What right has Germany to the Cameroons?’ or ‘What right has England to New Guinea?’—but the more fundamental question, ‘What right has any nation to mark out great tracts of the earth’s surface, inhabited by alien races, and proclaim, “This is ours”’? We inherit, of course, through our school-books, through our popular standards of value, the old pagan tradition which attached a glory to conquest. It is hard to divest ourselves of it, but a time of resettlement after a great world-convulsing war is just the time to re-examine our old principles of action.

One must notice that the question of overseas dominion is confused because the same term, ‘colonies’, is applied to two altogether disparate things. There are colonies proper, such as Canada and Australia, where the surplus population of a European country has emigrated into lands overseas and formed a new self-governing community, and there are dependencies, like British and German East Africa, where the administration of a territory, whose population, for climatic reasons, must always remain non-European, has been forcibly assumed by a European State. In reference to German Imperialism, there is no

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question of colonies in the proper sense. England is justly proud of her self-governing colonies, and they, on their part, contribute not a little to the strength of the British Empire as a world-power. It is now too late for Germany to get colonies in this sense, because there is no more unclaimed land left on the planet where a European race can live and propagate. England is not, in this matter, clinging selfishly to something which it might, if it were generous, make over to Germany. Australia and South Africa are not inert bodies to be handed about by superior Powers. They do not 'belong to' England : they are autonomous States which choose to be members of the British Empire. Whether they choose to adhere to it or whether they choose to leave it, no other Power can say them nay.

When we apply the word 'colonies' to the extra-European dependencies of Germany—and the same is true of most of the French 'colonies'—we mean something altogether different. They are not countries which give a home to an overflow European population, but countries inhabited by backward races and governed autocratically by small bodies of European officials. The British Empire, besides including colonies in the proper sense, includes also a number of dependencies of the same nature as the German and French colonial possessions. It is in relation to such dependencies, not to colonies proper, that Europe is faced with the moral problem indicated just now.

That the process by which white men in the last few generations have taken control of the lands inhabited by savage or barbarous peoples has some justification, we can see by asking ourselves whether the result of a contrary policy would have seemed satisfactory to us. Could we wish that a large and fertile part of the earth's surface should remain permanently in the sole possession of backward races who could never develop its resources for the benefit of mankind as a whole ? Obviously not. But what needs to be examined is the title of one civilized

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race as against the others to call a portion of this land its own. It is plain, surely, that we cannot speak here of the rights of property in the same sense in which we speak of the rights of private property in an organized State. What is 'mine' among my fellow-citizens is what I have acquired under certain conditions prescribed by the law of the State. But there is no common jurisdiction to which the different civilized nations are subject. By a kind of fiction the acquisition of 'colonial' Empire is sometimes assimilated to the acquisition of property in an organized State : documents are drawn up by Europeans in quasi-legal form, which barbarous chieftains are induced to sign and which make over to particular European trading companies the government of this or that extensive region. That a right based on this kind of play-acting is really like a right based on a legal transaction within a civilized State, it would be absurd to imagine. Or the right of the European nation to a territory is based on conquest *sans phrase*. But it is doubtful, surely, whether conquest can confer any 'right' at all. Conquest puts the conqueror in actual possession of a certain territory : he may hold it till a stronger comes to take it away : but the word 'right' would imply that all other Powers were bound to respect his title. Why should the stronger respect the title of the Power in possession, if the title had no other basis to start with than superior strength ?

The justification of 'white' rule in Africa and the South Seas is that the products of those countries are thereby made available for mankind as a whole. But, if so, the rule of any particular nation is only justified so far as it acts as trustee for the rest of the world. The moment it attempts to exploit the country for its own exclusive benefit, we have that anti-social kind of Imperialism which makes assured peace between nations impossible. It might be ideally desirable, as some writers like Mr. J. A. Hobson have indicated, if the rule of civilized nations over the backward parts of the earth were not

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left to the chances of a scramble but were directed and controlled by some central Council representing all the civilized nations. One does not see how, in the present state of the world, such an idea is practicable. Nothing, however, seems to need more concentrated thought by those who wish this war to be followed by a 'lasting settlement' than in what form an international character can be given to Imperialism. One thing at any rate seems plain at the outset. Any nation attempting to rule out the trade of other nations from the territory under its control by protective tariffs would be immediately condemned. There would have to be an open door for all trade alike. If a self-governing colony, like Canada or Australia, wished to establish in its own land a tariff preferential to the mother-country, or if a tariff were established in India which protected native industries against British and non-British competition alike, that, even if an economic mistake, would not offend against the principles of the new Imperialism. What would offend is that any nation, in a sphere which it ruled despotically, should give a preference to its own trade. If there are no longer after the war any extra-European territories administered by the German State, the German people should be given no reason to complain that their commercial energy had not full scope to develop on an equality with that of England, France, and America, wherever England, France, or America bore rule outside their own borders. Whatever measures we may rightly take during the war to capture German trade as a method of warfare, our only attempt after the war to capture German trade should be in the way of fair competition.

As a matter of fact, of course, England *has* in the past kept an open door in India and the Crown Colonies to the trade of other nations, and German commerce has developed more largely under the British flag than under the German. But England has never bound herself by an international undertaking to adhere to this policy. There is a doubt, it may be said, whether

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France would be willing to do so. Well, of course, France will do as she thinks best in her own dominions, and Great Britain is not in a position to prescribe to her. All we can say is, that supposing France, after the war, does take the course of placing German trade in her African Empire at a disadvantage to her own, the seeds of another European war will continue to be there.

But the European nations who bear rule in Asia, Africa, and the Islands of the Sea are not trustees for the rest of the world only. They are also trustees for the people of the land. If a conquest which suppresses any national life is criminal, no rule can be justified over those races which have not developed a civilized national life, except in so far as the ruling people does whatever is possible to develop the rudiments of it. That this is more or less recognized is proved by the frequency with which the autocratic rule of Europeans over Orientals or over backward races is justified by the benefits it confers. No one supposes that the motive of Europeans in establishing their rule was to confer benefits on the indigenous peoples: their motive was a commercial one; but they have been fain to justify their rule, when it is once there, by showing that it is the best thing for the people governed. It would be wrong not to recognize the extent to which a genuine sense of duty to the people governed was actually operative in the European Imperialism of the nineteenth century. The finer type of European administrator has always been ready to lay down his life for the good of the people committed to his charge. We may say that in so far, whether consciously Christian or not, he approximates to the standard of greatness characteristic of Christ's society, which goes by self-surrender in service and not by power to command, and according to which the Greatest of all was the Servant of all and came to lay down His life as a ransom for many. But we must recognize too that this Christian sense of service has been intermingled in the older Imperialism with the pagan pride of race, pride in the possession of power as

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such, just what Christ pointed to as characteristic of the kingdoms of the world and ruled out from His own. The two were blended in different proportions in different individuals. Sometimes one seemed entirely to exclude the other. If we were considering the effect of this pagan pride upon the work which the European, whether as civil servant or missionary, has been trying to do in Africa and the East, one would have to point out how its manifestations are more quickly felt and more keenly resented, as is natural, by the peoples of old civilization, such as those included in the Hindu castes, than by primitive and savage peoples, like the Indian hill-tribes or the black tribesmen of Africa ; and it is just in proportion as the European succeeds in transmitting his own civilization with its special standards of value, in proportion as the Asiatic or African becomes educated in the European way, that sensibilities are created to which the white man's assumption of superiority is wounding. At this point, however, we are rather considering the effect of pagan pride, the pride in empire, upon the relations of the European peoples to each other. And in this connexion one has to bear in mind how very large the element of imagination and sentiment has been in the colonial rivalry of the different nations. It has indeed been the profit to be extracted from the ' colonies ' which has incited different companies and financial groups to push the governments of their countries into a forward imperial policy. The governments, however, were no doubt moved partly, and the peoples who supported them were moved mainly, not by considerations of profit, but by the glamour and prestige of Empire. To the nameless multitude who went to the polls the overseas dominions were something which they saw in imagination through the medium of the popular press, and it added a gusto of pride to thousands of obscure lives to be able to reflect ' I belong to an imperial people '. It was such a feeling which made whole peoples ready to go to war, if any other nation threatened to touch their ' possessions '.

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If, on the other hand, the aspect of empire as service became the really popular one, it is questionable whether there would be the same intensity of competition for it among the nations. It seems possible that, as the result of this war, the already large British and French Empires may be further increased by the accession of territories which in July 1914 were German. Such an event may well be regarded with apprehension by those who have a sense of our existing responsibilities. But whether it ultimately proves an aggregate of power such as the world cannot stand depends on whether we honestly in practice conduct our administration in the spirit of unselfish trustees. If Germany, for instance, found in the experience of years that she could dispose of the products of her industry and acquire the raw materials she required as easily under the British flag as under her own, could she really go on believing that her national life was strangled, unless certain tracts in the backward parts of the earth were actually ruled by the German State—tracts, it is to be remembered, in which there could be no question of her emigrants, except in rare cases, finding a home?

But might not Germans say that even if Empire were divested of profit and of pride, it would still grieve them to be cut off from a share in the work of developing the waste lands and educating the backward peoples? If England and France acted honestly as impartial trustees, the Germans would not be cut off from their share in the task. They could still come into the different regions of Asia and Africa as traders and explorers and missionaries. They could still, as individual Germans, win an honoured name to be long remembered after them. It would not be Germans who had forfeited their share in the task: it would be the German State. Can we wish that to be otherwise? To be generous in a Christian way to our enemies does not mean that we are to ignore the enormity of the crimes perpetrated by the German State against humanity, honour, and civilization. These

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things have been done, and we cannot so displace the constitution of the world as to prevent their having consequences. It cannot now be possible that a claim of the German State to take a share in civilizing backward races should seem anything but a dreadful mockery. But we are bound to recognize the goodwill, the high sense of honour, the Christian temper, which characterize many individual Germans. As Monsieur Bédier remarks, after citing the journal kept by a German officer in the present war, we may find that the same document which is evidence against the Germans, as to their conduct of the war, proves also that there are Germans who will speak out as strongly and righteously as any one could desire about the facts, when they see them in their brutal reality, not through the distorting medium of official assurances.¹ We must hope that there will be a wide field for the beneficent activity of such Germans in the world after the war, and honour paid them among all nations.

One must of course recognize that to make the Imperialism of the future international, in spirit or in form, would not by any means neutralize all its danger. So far as the object of Empire is to develop the natural resources of the earth, to make Imperialism international would secure that this work should not be carried out for the exclusive benefit of this or that nation. The particular evil of rivalry between civilized States which the old Imperialism has involved would be cured. When, however, we think of the other trusteeship involved in Empire, trusteeship for the indigenous peoples, and consider the temptation which the rulers are under to assert their

¹ 'Diese Art Kriegführung ist direkt barbarisch. Ich wundere mich, wie wir über das Verhalten der Russen schimpfen können; wir hausen ja in Frankreich weit schlimmer, und bei jeder Gelegenheit wird unter irgend einem Vorwande gebrannt und geplündert. Aber Gott ist gerecht und sieht Alles: "Seine Mühlen mahlen langsam, aber schrecklich klein."' Journal of an officer in the 46th Regiment of Reserve Infantry, Vth Reserve Corps, date October 15, 1914. Cited by J. Bédier in the *Revue de Paris* for April 1915 (p. 615).

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power beyond what is needful, to refuse to resign it as the education of the people progresses, perhaps even to use it harshly and cruelly—that evil would not be cured by internationalizing Empire. It might even be made worse. Perhaps the worst fate that could befall the backward races is that they should fall under the dominion of vast international business organizations, without conscience or human care. Even German rule, whose principle was laid down by the German explorer Zintgraff as ‘Africa for the Africans *and the Africans for us*’,¹ might be better than that.

In view of the danger on that side, one may believe that it is desirable that particular nations should go on bearing the trusteeship for particular regions of the earth. So far as England bears it for the extra-European dependencies she will have after the war, the way of peace for her, so far as the other civilized nations are concerned, will be to hold the door as open for the world’s trade as it would be under any system of internationalism. With regard to the indigenous peoples, the most delicate and difficult part of her task is before her, as they are brought nearer to her by European education. It is true that she has a rich experience in dealing with primitive races, which give her an advantage over people coming fresh into the field. And yet self-complacency would be dangerous, since the worst difficulty is where England has to deal with peoples that are not primitive, or are ceasing to be so. Here in the future one may hope she will learn the lesson which her closer acquaintance in these days with the spirit and methods of German government might teach her. For the claim of the Germans to superiority is based on exactly that greater scientific system and order, that more perfect efficiency, which we believe we possess in reference to Orientals. We can realize what it would feel like if the German system were imposed

¹ *Das überseeische Deutschland*, by Hutter and others (Union Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft), p. 164. The saying is quoted as ‘the so uniquely right maxim of Zintgraff’.

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upon us by force. Supposing that happened, would it make up to us for the German arrogance if the advantages of German efficiency were clearly proved to us ? We know how we should feel, and we can understand, perhaps, how the demonstration that British rule is for their advantage does not immediately make up to sensitive men of the Oriental peoples for the manners of many Englishmen. There is too much akin to the German—that is the fact of the matter—in the Anglo-Indian ideal, something we shall have to get rid of, if we are to accomplish the delicate part of our task before us. This does not, of course, mean that government should be weakly carried on, or an inefficient person, European or Oriental, put, out of Christian charity, in a position for which he is unfit ; but we cannot help knowing that it is very hard, as human nature is, for the exercise of power to be separated from a love of power for its own sake, or for a race which has been in a position of privilege not to assert superiority in a hundred ugly ways. Ultimately, no doubt, it depends on the attitude of the heart : it is not the mere fact of rule which hurts ; it is the feeling which one human person has for the attitude of another ; and where some one really possessed by the spirit which wills rather to serve than to rule is called to rule, men can acknowledge his authority without the sense of humiliation. We need to be reminded over and over again that in none of the departments of life which bring human beings into contact with each other—neither in the relations of state to state, nor race to race, nor class to class—can any change in the forms of association, any readjustment of political or social arrangements, make the contact a happy one, apart from a change of heart.

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